

Public Testimony Before the Joint Education Committee
Regarding Raised HB 5357 – A Deaf Child Bill of Rights
March 5, 2012

Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischman, Co-Chairs and Committee Members:

I am Dr. Harvey Corson, President of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf and Co-Chair of the Deaf Child Bill of Rights Initiative. Thank you for this opportunity to present my testimony in support of this raised Bill.

Governor Malloy has recently stated that Connecticut is about Educational Excellence. Time has arrived for educational needs of all children in Connecticut to be addressed appropriately. After all, they are Connecticut's future. We wholeheartedly agree with him.

However, we need to recognize the need to include children who are deaf and hard of hearing. They constitute approximately one per cent of all Connecticut school population. They are a low incidence population that is often overlooked in terms of addressing their unique language and communication needs as well as acknowledging a wide educational achievement gap among these children as compared to children who can hear.

Research and professional literature indicate that intellectual functioning of children who are deaf and hard of hearing parallels the normal distribution of intellectual functioning among children who can hear. This achievement gap is not a reflection of their intellectual ability but rather a reflection of the lack of language and communication access they experience in educational settings. This wide achievement gap is not acceptable, thus we have an educational crisis.

This is not a Connecticut problem; it is a national problem. Eleven states in the United States – California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Montana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Texas—address this issue by enacting “Deaf Child Bill of Rights” legislation.

We commend you for taking this step as part of education reform. In addressing this educational crisis, we recommend three important considerations to be incorporated into this bill:

- 1) To ensure an effective statewide implementation, the Language and Communication Plan form needs to be designed by the State Department of Education, assuring a comprehensive discussion and that each child's chosen language/communication mode is respected and utilized in a variety of educational settings.

- 2) The child's planning and placement team (PPT) and individualized education program (IEP) team shall include an appropriate professional knowledgeable in education of deaf and hard of hearing children.

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3) The State Department of Education shall develop a statewide systematic approach to data tracking for the identification, early intervention, educational placement, and educational achievement of children who are deaf and hard of hearing from birth through age 21.

As for the fiscal note for this proposed bill, we are not adding any new mandates in this proposed legislation as they are already mandated by the Federal and state education laws. We are asking for a more appropriate attention to unique language and communication needs of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and to have a reasonable mechanism to track identification, placement, and educational achievement of these children in an existing state data tracking system.

Connecticut was the first state in the United States to help establish a school for the deaf in the country almost 200 years ago, to be more accurate—195 years ago. Connecticut can continue to exercise its educational leadership in addressing language and communication needs for all children who are deaf or hard of hearing in all educational settings and in tracking the identification, placement, and educational achievement of these children.

Thus, the rationale for this proposed legislation -- “A Deaf Child Bill of Rights” -- in Connecticut.

In closing, I want to share with you that parents, deaf and hard of hearing community, and professionals in the field of education of deaf and hard of hearing children in Connecticut are united in supporting this proposed legislation.

Thank you.